

young people—young students, young entrepreneurs, young business owners like those I visited and met with in Cuba—it is time to say: Yes, you can be part of the world. Yes, you can work with those in our country who want to make your life better. If we do that, we will see the real change—not slogans of change but substantive change.

I see my distinguished friend and colleague from Ohio on the floor. I will ask to put my full statement in the RECORD.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. I thank my colleague from Vermont, the President pro tempore of the U.S. Senate.

I was able to listen to some of his remarks regarding Cuba. This is a truly historic time in that island country. The demonstrations, I am told, are as large as they have been since at least 1959.

My hope is that the countries of the Americas, all of which I just visited—four of them down in Latin America—that believe in democracy, that believe in the ability for people to come together and gather and express their continues, that believe in strong human rights, would come together and support the Cuban people at this critical point.

My understanding is, there are some opportunities to ensure that internet access continues among those demonstrating. My understanding is that there are human rights abuses occurring even now as we talk with regard to those demonstrators.

I appreciate my colleague. He has spent a lot of time trying to take the Cuban relationship, which has been a fraught one, and make it better. My hope is that what we are seeing right now on the streets of Havana and elsewhere around that country will lead to a better day for the people of Cuba.

LATIN AMERICA CODEL

Madam President, I did just return from a bipartisan trip to the area. I went with Senators TIM KAINE, JOHN HOEVEN, BEN RAY LUJÁN, MIKE CRAPO, and CHRIS COONS to Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and Guatemala.

I want to talk a bit about what we learned and a bit about some of the ways forward to help these countries and, frankly, to help ourselves here in America more by changing some of our policies—not just asking them to change what they do but changing some things we do.

It was an opportunity to show our support for these countries. These are our neighbors in Latin America. All of them are allies. I understand this is the first major congressional delegation trip since the COVID-19 crisis began to abate, and we chose Latin America. They are our neighbors. They are at our front door, in fact.

I did find when we were down there that there was a lot of appreciation for the fact that we were showing up and talking about America's role in the re-

gion and, frankly, the role of China and even Russia and Iran and other countries—at least in the Venezuelan area with regard to Russia and Iran and Cuba. It has been increasing at a time when sometimes the U.S. presence is not felt as acutely. So it is important for us to be there as a country that is still a beacon of hope and opportunity for those who seek democracy and freedom and human rights. That is our role, in my view, is to continue to be that model but also to provide assistance, more trade, to provide a way for these countries to be able to see more prosperity and peace themselves. So I thought it was an important trip and an important opportunity to be there.

We had the opportunity to meet with the President of each of these four countries. In fact, none of our meetings with the respective Presidents went for less than 2 hours. These were very honest dialogues. We got into some depth into the issues.

We were able to discuss the COVID-19 crisis. Each President was appreciative of the fact that the American taxpayer has helped to provide some vaccines to these countries. It is not everything they want, of course. They still need a lot more vaccines because their vaccine rates are far lower than ours. But each of these countries has suffered in terms of the impact of COVID-19, and each of these countries is eager to get back on their feet, to get the economy working again, to get their people back to work, back to school, back to a more normal life just like in this country.

We talked about the surge of migration to the United States and the pressure on our southern border but also here in America, in the interior, what is happening with regards to more and more migrants surging at the border. We are looking at 170,000, even 180,000 per month now in the months of April, May, and June. So we do have to deal with that issue.

Many of these countries are sending their young people and others to our borders. By the way, the Presidents of these countries all said the same thing. They want their people to stay in their country. They want their people to stay there to be part of the future of their country, to be able to help develop the economy and the prosperity that they seek in their democracies.

Sometimes that is not understood even by American policymakers, who think, with all great intentions—who are opening up more in the sense of providing a magnet, really, pulling people to the north.

That treacherous journey north is also something that many of these Presidents commented on. Ecuador, as an example—you might not think of it as one of the countries that send a lot of migrants to the United States. You think of Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala. My understanding is, they surpassed Honduras last month in the number of migrants they are sending to our border from Ecuador. They want

those people to stay in Ecuador and be citizens there and help contribute to that country's growth.

Unfortunately, the impact with COVID-19 has made things more difficult in each of these countries. So their economies have been weakened just as ours was weakened. They were hit even harder and even longer, again, with the lack of vaccines. Again, we are helping them with that. I support that. I think it is very important.

By the way, the Chinese are also selling a lot of vaccines throughout Latin America and trying very hard to influence what is going on in this part of the world, which is our hemisphere. The United States needs to be there for many reasons, and that is one.

We also talked about the need for the continued battle against corruption in these countries and throughout Latin America and to ensure that you do have more transparency and a governing environment that is driven by the rule of law so there can be more investment from the United States and more trade between us.

In Ecuador in particular, we talked about the need for a new trade agreement, which I support, which would really help to strengthen our ties with Ecuador at a critical time in their history but also would be good economically for both countries' mutual benefit.

With regard to Colombia, Guatemala, and, of course, Mexico, we have trade agreements, but we talked about how to improve those trade agreements—how they operate and are implemented on the ground. I am a former U.S. Trade Representative. I helped to negotiate the Colombia trade agreement. I also helped with regard to the CAFTA agreement, which included Guatemala. Those agreements were helpful at the time. They could be even more helpful if they could be improved in certain respects, and we talked specifically about that.

Each President basically said the same thing: They would prefer trade to aid. They are not against U.S. assistance. They appreciate it, and we do assist those countries in a number of different ways. Yet what they really want is the ability to have more commerce, more U.S. investment, more jobs—therefore, more economic growth and more opportunities for their young people so they will stay in those countries. Continued support from the United States is crucial in all of these matters.

With regard to COVID, we can supply more personal protective gear. They still need it. Certainly, the donations of vaccines have been very helpful. When we were in Guatemala, the Biden administration announced it was delivering 1.2 million doses of vaccines, approximately doubling the number of Guatemalans who can now be vaccinated. Now, I will tell you that is still only something like 10 or 12 percent, so it is still relatively low. This is a first good step, and we need to try to

do more. As was the case in the United States, once these populations are vaccinated, they will be able to get their economies back on their feet.

Our trip also allowed us to see firsthand the problems associated with the surge of migration that has been playing out on our southern border for so many months. In many cases, families in Latin America leave their homes for economic opportunities so that they can find a better way for their kids and their grandkids in the United States. Yet, while we were impacted here, so were the countries the migrants passed through, and each of them told us this. Our allies to the south—and we were there with them—are overwhelmed sometimes in providing shelters and services for those who are migrating through their countries, even in the case of Guatemala having a number of migrants there from Honduras and El Salvador and Ecuador to whom they are providing shelter.

We visited some of these migrant shelters, one in Ecuador and one in Guatemala. We saw some of the very good work that nongovernmental organizations are doing there, including those supported by USAID. They provide housing, counseling, and education to migrant families. We mostly saw young women and young mothers with young children, and many of these women had been trafficked. In other words, they had been promised the ability to go north, but, in effect, their traffickers had put them in situations wherein they had been abused. Therefore, these shelters are there to try to protect them as much as anything else. It was very emotional. Their stories were heartbreaking.

Again, I would just say that, in terms of the role the United States plays here, there are a number of policies we have in place that allow these coyotes, as they call the human smugglers, to go to a family in a poor country in Latin America and say: “Pay me a lot of money,” say \$10,000, which for a family in a poor part of Honduras is their life savings and their mortgage on their home and is probably money they have to borrow, “and we will take your kids to the United States. Because the United States allows those children to come in as long as they claim asylum, we will commit to you that we can get those kids into the United States, and they will go to school, and everything will be good, and maybe they can bring you up later.” The coyotes can say that because of our policies.

By the way, it is not good for many of these children or for many of these women, in particular, for what happens on that dangerous journey north is something that would break your heart when you hear the stories. Many are assaulted. Some are left in the desert, and others are mistreated in other ways.

The point is that U.S. policy contributes to this. I know this is a hard truth, and it may be that my colleagues and I can never figure this out,

but it seems to me that we should not have an asylum policy that encourages people to come to the north and then to come into the country pending approval of their asylum cases when, in fact, only about 15 percent—that is one, five—of these migrants will ever receive asylum claims. Yet virtually all of them stay in the United States. In 2019, which was the last time we had a big surge like this, it was mostly children and unaccompanied minors, even though only 15 percent of them, on average, have had successful claims. What does that mean? That means that the United States, as I said earlier, is a magnet. We are pulling people north.

These countries don't want to lose their people. Many of these migrants are being mistreated along the way, including children who are placed by U.S. Agencies into sponsor families who sometimes mistreat them. We have done studies on this. We have done two studies in the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and bipartisan studies wherein we have concluded that we do not have effective ways to place these children who are, again, brought to the U.S. border and allowed into the United States because of our policies.

I know this is a tough issue, and our hearts go out to these migrants—they really do—but we have to have a policy that makes sense and a policy that allows people to come legally to the United States in an orderly way, in a humane way, and not continue this policy that effectively gives the coyote, the human smuggler, a pretty good narrative—a pretty credible one—that, if you pay me, I will get you into the interior, into Ohio, where I am from, or into some other State.

Again, the way our system works, because there is a backlog of about 1.2 million people for these cases and because only 15 percent at the end of the day, on average, are going to get their asylum claims approved, these people tend to stay in the community. I don't blame them for coming. I really don't. Every family I have talked to along the border, when I have been there or down there when I was in these four countries over the last week, tells me the same thing: They want more opportunity.

Some truly do have a fear of persecution in their countries, and they should be given asylum. Again, that is about 15 percent. The vast majority, of course, will live lives that are lives of poverty. They want more opportunity, and we want to provide that opportunity. This is why there isn't an issue right now with regard to this: How does the United States best help in their home countries?

We talked about the pull factor, which is U.S. policy. By the way, when title 42 ends, which is a provision that is in place now with regard to adults to say: You can't come into America because of COVID-19—when title 42 ends, which will happen at the end of the healthcare emergency, the administra-

tion needs to be prepared for a further surge of individuals coming to America—this time adults. Already, for kids, title 42 has been ended by the Biden administration. Therefore, we have seen what has happened. Already, for most families, now title 42 has been ended, and we have seen what has happened. We have seen these surges of 170,000 to 180,000 people a month.

When it has ended for adults, it will be even more difficult. At a minimum, I would urge the Biden administration to be prepared as it wasn't last time. You will remember the huge influx and the children who were left in Border Patrol detention facilities for far longer than they were legally allowed to be there under U.S. law and living side by side on the floor, on pads, at the time of COVID but without having any COVID tests. That was wrong, just as it will be wrong if we don't prepare for the adults. My view is we should keep title 42 in place for now. We still do have a COVID issue, and countries to the south have an even larger COVID issue that is much more pronounced than ours.

We should put in place sensible policies to allow people to come in legally in higher numbers. I support that. Temporary worker programs, in my view, are good for both sides right now. We have a work shortage. We also have a need to ensure that these people are coming in a legal way, through proper means. We should also have rules that work and laws that mean something. People who wait in line for years in these countries to come legally are looking and saying: Why should I wait when my neighbor can just walk up to the border and come to Columbus, OH?

So I do think there is an opportunity here, in having been down there and having talked to these countries, for us to do a better job in helping these countries to develop their own economies and to provide opportunities for people in those countries. This avoids the so-called push factor.

Now, getting it through Congress is not going to be easy, and it is not going to be done quickly. I know that many are saying that \$4 billion that the Biden administration has promised to these countries is going to make all of the difference. It will start, and that is good, but we have to acknowledge that we also need to change the pull side. It is going to take time—decades, in fact—to allow people in these countries to have close to the kind of economic opportunities that they would have in coming across the border. The United States is a country where there is still opportunity for everyone, including these migrants, and that is a great thing. Yet we have to be sure there is also a system that is orderly and legal to allow them to come here in a safe and humane way. So that is one thing we talked about a lot down there.

The other thing we talked about a lot, as you can imagine, is the issue of Venezuela. I mentioned earlier what was going on in Cuba, and Cuba influences Venezuela greatly. The fact that

the Maduro regime in Venezuela can survive is because of Cuba and some other help, by the way, from the Russians and others. There is a problem, which is that the country is a basket case right now economically. Therefore, people are leaving. They are surging out of the country as fast as they can. There are 1.7 million Venezuelan refugees in the country of Colombia. Think about that. Colombia, to its credit, has said: We are going to take care of these people. It has given them temporary protected status. It has given them places to live and shelter, and Colombia is taking them in as refugees. I also saw this in Ecuador, where they have hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan refugees.

This is impacting not just Venezuela, but is impacting our allies in the region, who are required—again, I commend them for this—to be able to help in this crisis. It is one reason we need to be sure that we deal with these issues in Cuba and in Venezuela to try to give people the ability to live in a free and open society, with a democracy, because then they will tend to stay home and develop their economies, compared to what we are seeing in the streets of the cities of Cuba today and seeing the misery that we see in Venezuela. We talked about that a lot as you can imagine.

Finally, we talked a lot about the illegal narcotics issue because the narcotics trade is devastating these countries, not just because people are using in those countries, which they are, by the way, in increasing numbers, but more because of the transit going through these countries and the corruption that results from the huge amount of money that is involved in the drug trade.

In a place like Colombia, unfortunately, the cocaine production is up. During COVID, they increased the production of cocaine, not decreased it, as you might think. And where is this cocaine going? I pushed and pushed on the data here with the U.S. Embassy and with our Colombian counterparts. Roughly, 90 percent of this cocaine, they believe, is coming to the United States of America.

Are we helping these countries? Certainly not by our drug policies. I mentioned the immigration policies earlier that are not helping these countries. How about the drug policies? If we can't do a better job of reducing demand in America, it is hard to see how these countries in Latin America can, all of which are affected.

The transit through Ecuador is their big issue and the corruption that results. In Mexico, of course, the drug cartels control parts of the Mexican countryside right now. There is terrible violence in Mexico because of the cartels, because of the drug trade.

I was impressed with every President I met with, including President Lopez Obrador, who is doing his best in a very difficult situation. What would be helpful to him is to have, in his case, less

of a crystal meth, heroin, and fentanyl demand in the United States, because that is coming into his country and then going up north. It is creating huge problems in his country, including, again, a higher usage in each of these countries as well. They are impacted also by the deadly nature of these drugs. Fentanyl, as you know, is killing more people by overdose deaths than any other drug right now.

Our overdose deaths in the United States of America are increasing to the point that, over the last 12 months and from every data point we have, it looks like we had the worst year in the history of our country in terms of overdose deaths.

Before the pandemic, we were making progress. We were actually reducing use, reducing overdoses, reducing overdose deaths. What we did here was make a difference with the, roughly, \$5 billion of additional spending this Chamber approved in the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and also in other legislation to help the States be able to provide better prevention, better treatment options, and more long-term recovery.

We were actually making progress, and then the pandemic hit. We have to get back to it, folks. We have to redouble our efforts, and we have the legislation to do that. Senator WHITEHOUSE and I have legislation called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act 3.0, the third version of it.

We need to be smarter on telehealth options. We need to be smarter on encouraging what works in terms of prevention because that is good for us as a country but also, again, because of the devastation that it is causing in every country that I was in—in every one of them. They want us to do a better job here so that they won't have to suffer the consequences there.

When I talked to President Duque in Colombia, whose commitment to fighting the narco-traffickers is absolutely critical—and we appreciate him so much for what he is doing—he had to tell me: The real issue is the demand in your country. It is harder for me to solve the problem here.

He is absolutely right. So we can, and I think we will, as a Congress, begin to refocus on this issue. I hope, post-COVID and get back to a situation where we are seeing progress in reducing use and reducing overdoses and overdose deaths and, in fact, helping these countries be able to get back on their feet.

Finally, in terms of trade, not aid and commerce, it is a great opportunity for us right now. Certainly, China thinks so. It is investing in these countries, and we should be too. We should be looking at these countries not just as neighbors but as true allies who have been with us on democracy-building, on human rights; who have been with us on international issues and as neighbors who really care about the relationship between our countries.

My hope is that our trip, as small as it was with just six Senators and just a

few days in the region, was helpful to ensure those ties are deepened, to establish new ties, and to, perhaps, with some of the followup we are going to do, encourage more investment, more trade, and more commerce with these countries. But also, I hope that it was an eye-opener for all of us that we have got our role to do here. We need an immigration policy that makes sense, not just for us, but for these countries as well. We need to have a policy with regard to drugs where we are doing a better job at reducing the demand side of the equation, not that we shouldn't stop on the eradication of crops and the interdiction of drugs.

It all helps to reduce the issue, because the price of the drug will go up if there is less supply, and that is important for fentanyl which is so inexpensive and so deadly and so powerful. But the most important thing by far is to allow people to get into treatment—understanding this is a disease—to allow people to have longer-term recovery options and to come up with more effective ways to prevent the use of the drug in the first place and to ensure that we are working together with our Latin neighbors and with our communities here in this country to do just that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The Senator from Utah.

REMEMBERING DEAN COX

Mr. ROMNEY. Mr. President, I rise today to honor and celebrate the outstanding legacy of my dear friend Dean Cox. His enduring commitment to public service over the course of his life and his consequential career are worthy of the highest praise.

Many Utahns knew Dean as an accomplished Washington County commissioner, but those closest to him knew him as a loving friend, a neighbor, dad, grandfather, and husband, who devoted his life to helping others.

With Dean's passing, Washington County has lost one of its finest public servants. Dean's legacy reminds us that the most reliable path to success in public and private life is marked by an unwavering dedication to principle and compassion.

With people from across our State, we extend our deepest sympathy to his family and his loved ones. He is a man we will miss very, very much.

Dean's lifetime of public service in Washington County and across southern Utah cements his reputation as an indispensable expert on a wide range of vital services for first responders, businesses, and State and local governments.

A true son of southern Utah, Dean was raised on the family pasture by his veteran father and caring mother in St. George. Throughout his youth, Dean learned how to fix just about anything in his father's garage and mechanic's shop, mastering his trade craft in Bob's Garage.

The course of his life would, however, change while attending Brigham Young